

THE
SIN AND DANGER
OF NEGLECTING THE
PUBLIC SERVICE
OF THE
CHURCH,
PLAINLY SET FORTH:

AND
THE COMMON PRETENCES FOR
SUCH NEGLECT CONSIDERED,
AND THEIR WEAKNESS EXPOSED.

By a PRESBYTER of the CHURCH of ENGLAND.

A NEW EDITION.

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THE
SIN AND DANGER
OF NEGLECTING THE
PUBLIC SERVICE, &c.

RELIGIOUS WORSHIP is a Debt to Almighty GOD, as the Author of our Being, and the Fountain of all our Happiness: This is a truth that is universally owned by all Mankind, those only excepted (if there can be any such) that foolishly imagine there is no GOD: or, that are so insensibly stupid, or swollen with Pride, and monstiously ungrateful, as to take no Notice of HIM, in whom *they live, and move, and have their Being.*

The Heathen World were indeed grossly mistaken with regard to the Object of their religious Worship, and the Manner of performing it; GOD, in his heavy Displeasure, permitting this as a just punishment for their sinning against natural Conscience, and their disregarding those Discoveries that he hath made of himself to all Mankind, by the Frame and Government of the World. Hence it was, that they worshipped not only the Ghosts of dead Men, and those many

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times the vilest and worst of Men; but the Fowls of the Air, and the Beasts of the Field, and the meanest of Insects.— Hence it was, that they made themselves Gods of Wood and Stone, that could neither see, nor hear, nor taste, nor smell. Nay, hence it was, that they worshipped the Devil himself, under Images of such hideous Forms and Shapes, as are frightful to behold. And as they were thus miserably deluded in the Object of their Worship, so were they likewise in the Manner of it. The Mysteries of their Religion were filled with Lewdness and Debauchery; their Sacrifices, were barbarous and cruel; *they offered up their Sons and their Daughters unto Devils; and made them pass through the Fire unto Moloch.* But in this they unanimously agreed, and this was the constant Practice of them all, to pay some religious Worship, suitable to their Notions or Apprehensions of the God they worshipped.

How careful then should we Christians be of this great Duty! How mindful of worshipping the LORD our GOD! We, that know the only true God, and JESUS CHRIST whom He hath sent: we, that have the Nature and Will of GOD plainly revealed

Neglecting the Public Service, &c. 5

revealed to us in the holy Scriptures, written by the Inspiration and Direction of his holy Spirit; how inexcusable shall we appear, and what dreadful Vengeance may we not justly look for? Even the most dismal Effects of God's fiery Wrath and Indignation; if, when we know God, we glorify Him not as God, nor worship Him in Spirit and in Truth; if we do not acknowledge his divine Perfections, depend upon his Providence, and resign up ourselves entirely to his holy Will and Pleasure; if we do not delight in his Laws, fear his Displeasure, trust in his Mercy, love Him with all our Hearts and Minds, and in every Thing by Prayer and Supplication with Thanksgiving, let our Requests be made known unto Him: But especially, if we do not love the Habitation of his House, the Place where his Honour dwelleth; if we do not keep his Sabbaths, and reverence his Sanctuary, and regularly join with his Ministers there in his House of Prayer, at the stated Times for public Devotion, in acknowledging and confessing our Offences unto Him, in giving Him Thanks for the great Blessings we daily receive at his Hands, in setting forth his most worthy Praise, in hearing his most holy Word, and in

asking of Him those Things which are requisite and necessary, as well for our Bodies as our Souls.

For this is one of the most effectual Ways to give unto the LORD the Glory due unto his Name; to advance the Honour of GOD, and the Credit of Religion: And accordingly, this is a Duty that is earnestly pressed upon us in holy Scripture, and recommended to us in the general and constant Practice of the best and wisest Men in all Ages of the Church. And though, indeed, the bare outward Performance of this Duty, though the bare frequenting the Public Worship of Almighty GOD, is no infallible Demonstration of a true Christian, since it is possible for us to draw near to him with our Lips, and to worship him with our Bodies, when our Hearts are far from Him: Yet, on the other Hand, the wilful causeless neglecting of this great and necessary Duty, is a sure and certain Proof of the contrary. And those who continue thus, without any just Impediment, to absent themselves from the Congregation of CHRIST's faithful Servants, assembled together for divine Service, do but too plainly declare to the World, that they have no true Fear of GOD, nor Sense of Religion.

Religion upon their Minds. This perhaps will be thought a severe Censure by such deluded people; but I cannot but hope, they themselves will own it to be just and true; if they will but give themselves Time calmly and seriously to consider the plain Arguments set forth in this little Treatise; the Design whereof is to convince them of their Sin and Danger, and to persuade them, with the Assistance of God's Grace, to flee from the Wrath to come, by repenting truly of their past Omissions of this their bounden Duty, and returning sincerely and without Delay to the regular Practice of it; that so by thus approving themselves true and sound Members of CHRIST'S Church Militant here on Earth, they may, through his Merits and Mediation, at last become happy Members of his Triumphant Church in Heaven.

That it is the indispensable Duty of every Christian to frequent our Assemblies for religious Worship, will very evidently appear, if we consider,

FIRST, That we were all made and sent into this World on Purpose to advance GOD'S Honour and Glory. This is the great End of our Creation: This is the

End of all Religion; and consequently, this is the most important Duty, and the most weighty Business of our Lives.— And as we appear to be more or less concerned for the Honour of our God, so does He appear to be more or less concerned for the Happiness of us his People: *For them that honour him he will honour, but he scorneth the Scorners*; and they that despise Him, shall be lightly esteemed. It is our Duty, therefore, to have a Regard to God's Honour and Glory, in all our Conversation here upon Earth; and *whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the Glory of God*, 1 Cor. x. 31. But we do then in a more especial Manner advance his Glory, when we assemble and meet together for religious Worship; *for in his Temple doth every Man speak of his Honour*, Psal. xxix. 8. It is there that we adore his divine Perfections, and tell of all his wondrous Works. It is there that we publicly own him to be our God, openly acknowledge our Dependence upon Him, and bind ourselves by new and solemn Engagements to continue his obedient and faithful Servants. It is there that we profess CHRIST in the Face of the World, and *shew forth his Salvation from Day to Day*, with visible and decent Solemnities. It is there that we advance
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the Credit of Religion, by our mutual Consent and Agreement in holy Offices. It is there that we let our Light so shine before Men, that they may see our good Works, and glorify our Father which is in Heaven. In a Word, it is there, in the Temple, or Place set apart for religious Worship, that God's Honour dwelleth; and therefore we are commanded to worship Him there, *in the Beauty of Holiness; that so we may give unto the Lord the Glory due unto his Name,* Psal. xxix. 2.

Accordingly, God hath appointed his Ministers to attend continually upon this very Thing: And that his People also may be ready duly to attend their Ministrations, He hath set apart one Day in the Week for his own immediate Service: Wherein we are all required to disengage our Hearts and Hands from our worldly Employments, and to attend the holy Convocations that are held upon that Day in every Parish, to the Praise and Glory of God's holy Name. And if we run over the whole History of the Church, from its first planting to our own Times, we shall find, that the true and faithful Servants of CHRIST ever made so high Account of this Duty, that they did not

think themselves excused from it in Times of Persecution, by the Danger of Imprisonment, Confiscation of their Goods, or even of Death itself. Shall not then that noble Army of Martyrs and Confessors, who preferred the Practice of this Duty of Assembling themselves together for the solemn Worship and Service of God, before their Peace and Safety, before their Goods and Possessions, yea, before their very Lives, rise up in Judgment with the Men of this Generation, and condemn them: Who having all due Encouragement from the Civil Power to the due and constant Performance of this Duty, are tempted by any slight Occasions to neglect it? How highly then does it concern all those that are guilty of this Neglect, seriously to consider what they are doing? And if they can think it a small Crime to disobey the Commands of their lawful Governors, both in Church and State; if they can think it a small Crime to disregard the Examples of the best and wisest of Men in all Ages of the Church; yet surely, they cannot think it a small Crime to disown their Maker, to renounce his Authority and Dominion over them, to rob God of his Honour, of which he is ever jealous, to deny Him

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that Tribute of Homage and Service which is naturally due unto Him, as the Author of their Being, and Fountain of all their Happiness.

If they continue thus to despise the great GOD of Heaven and Earth, they must expect to find him at last a consuming Fire, that will devour them, and destroy them for ever. For alas! where can they hope to secure themselves from the Vengeance of GOD? or what will they do when the Lord shall visit them? when *He shall speak unto them in his Wrath, and vex them in his sore Displeasure*; when He shall rise up in the Fierceness of his Anger, to vindicate his own Honour, to glorify Himself in the utter Destruction of such daring Sinners, as are not afraid to affront, in this outrageous Manner, that great GOD, *who is glorious in Holiness, fearful in Praises, doing Wonders*? Exod. xv. 11. That great GOD, before whom the blessed Inhabitants of Heaven veil their Faces, and cast their Crowns before his Throne, as being sensible of their great Unworthiness; while they continually sing, *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth: Heaven and Earth are full of the Majesty of thy Glory.*

2dly, That it is the Duty of every Christian to frequent our Assemblies for religious Worship, will further appear, if we consider, **SECONDLY**, That we are commanded in holy Scripture to love the **LORD** our **GOD**, with all our Heart and Mind, with all our Soul and Strength: And this is called by our **SAVIOUR** himself the first and great Commandment. And indeed, unless we do this, unless we thus love **GOD** above all the World, we cannot do any one Thing to please Him or to obtain his Favour. Love is that holy Incense that perfumes all our Services, and makes them acceptable in God's Sight. But now, with what Face can those People pretend thus to love God, who refuse to fulfil his Commandments, and to hearken to the Voice of his Words? How can they love God, who hate his Company; who take no Delight in conversing with Him in his holy Ordinances, in Prayers and Sacraments, and hearing his holy Word?

This is the nearest Conversation, we can ever have with God while we live in this World. And, if we delight thus to draw nigh to him, He will vouchsafe to draw nigh to us, and to make us glad with

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with the Joy of his Countenance: He will make all his Goodness pass before us; give us such a lively, ravishing Sense of his Loving-kindness and tender Mercy, as will constrain us to love the Habitation of his House, to desire as earnestly to converse with Him there, in his holy Ordinances, as the Hart panteth after the Water-brooks; and to esteem one Day in his Courts, better than a thousand elsewhere employed. But now, if we slight these Blessings of his gracious Presence, and have no Desire to behold the fair Beauty of the LORD, and to visit his Temple, and yet at the same Time pretend to love Him with all our Heart, our Hearts must needs give us the Lie; for we are really Haters of the LORD: And when that terrible Day is come, in which all the Haters of the Lord shall be found Liars, we shall be banished for ever from his gracious Presence, and exposed to the dreadful Effects of his everlasting Vengeance.

3dly, The Necessity of this Duty will yet further appear, if we consider, **THIRDLY**, That by refusing to join in our public Assemblies for religious Worship, we cut ourselves off from the Congregation of CHRIST's Flock, deprive ourselves of the inestimable

inestimable Blessings of Christianity, and deliver ourselves over unto *Satan*; a Punishment, which, by the primitive Church, was inflicted upon none but great and notorious Sinners, 1 *Cor.* v. 5. We are no longer Members of CHRIST's Militant Church on Earth, nor shall ever be admitted Members of his Triumphant Church in Heaven; *For Christ is only the Saviour of the Body*, Eph. v. 23. *and that Body is the Church*, or the Society of faithful Christians, Chap. i. 22, 23. But we cannot approve ourselves Members of that Society, we cannot approve ourselves Members of the Church, the mystical Body of CHRIST, unless we frequent her public Worship; unless we communicate with her in the outward Offices and Duties of Religion: And therefore it is recorded of the first Converts to Christianity, as their distinguishing Mark and Character, *That they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in Breaking of Bread, and in Prayers*, Acts ii. 42. If then we would not forfeit our Title to all the Privileges of our Christian Profession; if we would not deprive ourselves of all the Blessings of the Gospel, and all the Purchase of CHRIST's Blood; if we would not lose the Benefit of all the Means of Grace and Salvation, and all our Interest

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in the Merits and Intercession of our ever-blessed Redeemer, we must make it appear, that we hold Communion with the Church, the mystical Body of CHRIST, by duly frequenting her public Worship.

And so shall we approve ourselves true and living Members of CHRIST, our Life and Head, the Children of God, and Heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven; we shall enjoy the Benefit of all God's holy Ordinances; the Benefit of public Prayer, even of the public Prayers of all God's People throughout the World; the Benefit of the holy Sacraments, the Signs and Seals of God's heavenly Grace; the Benefit of the ingrafted Word, which is able to save our Souls: We shall obtain the sanctifying Gifts and Graces of God's Holy Spirit, to incline and enable us to perform our Duty, and to work out our own Salvation. Thus, when the Disciples of our LORD were assembled together for religious Worship, that eminent Promise of the Comforter was fulfilled by the miraculous Descent of the Holy Ghost, in the Form of fiery Tongues, *Acts* ii. 1. And though those miraculous Gifts are now ceased in the Church, there being no farther Occasion for them, after that the
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Christian Church was sufficiently planted and confirmed; yet the renewing and sanctifying Graces of the Holy Spirit are still dispensed in a plentiful Manner to the true Worshippers of God in our public Assemblies; and there, ordinarily, is the Ground-work of true Faith first laid: *Faith cometh by Hearing, and Hearing by the Word of God, Rom. x. 17.*

Of how great Power and Efficacy the united Prayers of CHRIST's faithful Servants thus assembled together, are, in procuring those divine Virtues and Graces which are the proper Fruits and Gifts of the Spirit, we may learn from *Matt. xviii. 19.* *If two of you shall agree on Earth, as touching any Thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven: For where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the Midst of them.* Our blessed LORD, foreseeing that the Love of many would wax cold, and that as many who had professed themselves his Disciples and Followers *went back and walked no more with him, John vi. 66.* so there would be Multitudes of such false Professors, that would forsake his Church, in all the succeeding Ages of it: He, therefore, that his little Flock, which faithfully adhered to Him, might

might never be discouraged, from the Smallness of their Number, to assemble themselves together in his Name, makes this gracious Promise to two or three, the least Number that could so meet together.

Let us then hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised. And if we desire those sanctifying Gifts of the Holy Spirit, without which we can do nothing which is good, nor move one Step towards Heaven; let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, but wait for the Loving-kindness of God in the Midst of his Temple. Let us wait there with Patience and Constancy, like the poor impotent Man at the Pool of *Bethesda*, for the moving of the Waters, that so all the inward Maladies and Distempers of our Hearts may be healed: Let us wait there, till the South Wind blow upon our Garden, that the Spices thereof may flow out; till the Beloved of our Souls comes into his Garden and eats his pleasant Fruit, Cant. iv. 16. And certainly none that understand the true Value of those Blessings which the Holy Spirit there divideth and distributeth severally, as He willeth, can be content to lose their Share of them.

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I shall now consider more particularly the several Parts of the excellent Service of our Church, in order to make it still more evident, that it is really a very desirable Privilege, as well as a most important Duty, to frequent the same. The several Parts then of which the public Service of our Church does consist, are fully and clearly reckoned up in the *Exhortation*, that most incomparable Introduction to divine Worship, placed in the Beginning of *Morning* and *Evening Service*: where we may find them reduced to the following Particulars:

FIRST, the humble Confession of our Sins to GOD Almighty, and the begging his gracious Pardon. Now, however black and dismal an Exercise this may appear to some, to retire into their own Breasts, and see how their Accounts stand betwixt GOD and themselves, yet the humble Penitent finds this the only sovereign Method of healing thoroughly all the inward Maladies and Distempers of his Soul; of easing and removing that most insupportable Torment, the Pangs of a guilty Conscience, and restoring him to perfect Peace and Tranquillity of Mind. This, then, is one Instance of that great Happiness which every Christian enjoys

that duly and constantly attends the public Service of our Church; if he draws near to the Throne of God's heavenly Grace, and with a pure Heart, and humble Voice, joins with his Minister in that general Confession set down in our Common Prayer Books, at the Beginning of *Morning and Evening Service*: if he there confesses, with Shame and Sorrow, that he hath left undone those Things which he ought to have done; and done those Things which he ought not to have done: and begs of God to have Mercy upon him, according to his Promises in JESUS CHRIST our Saviour; if he humbly implores the Divine Assistance, to enable him hereafter to lead a godly, righteous, and sober Life; resolving, at the same Time, to use his own best Endeavours for that Purpose; then will our gracious God, who desireth not the Death of a Sinner, but rather that he may turn from his Wickedness and live, pardon and absolve him from all his Sins, how many and great soever they be. Accordingly, he hath given Power and Commandment to his Minister to pronounce his gracious Pardon to every such humble Penitent; to declare, in his Name, that God pardoneth and absolveth all those that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel.

Gospel. And now, this by the way should determine People to come to Church at the Beginning of divine Service, lest by not joining in the *General Confession*, they lose their Part in the *Absolution* that follows it; and thereby deprive their Souls of a Blessing, infinitely greater than all this World can bestow upon them.

SECONDLY, Another End, or Part of divine Service, is to lay open our Wants before our Almighty and most merciful Father; to make our humble Application to Him for a Supply of such good Things as his infinite Wisdom knows convenient for us, with respect to this, and a future Life. And none sure, who believe and hope for Heaven and eternal Happiness, can complain of this as an hard or difficult Exercise, only with an hearty Earnestness and Sincerity to beg of God, for the Sake of his only begotten Son, who hath purchased and prepared those heavenly Mansions, safely to conduct them thither, by such Methods as seem best to his infinite Wisdom and Goodness. Nay, none, one would think, who own an almighty over-ruling Providence here below, which, notwithstanding the Plots and Designs laid and carried on by vain Men,

Men, orders and disposes of all Things; one, I say, one would think, who considers this, should be backward in begging, through the same all-powerful Mediator, Protection from those Dangers and Difficulties they are every Moment obnoxious to, and Deliverance from those they lie under; with the Continuance of that Ease, Pleasure, and Prosperity they at present enjoy, and the Supply of what they want.

Were all Christians assured that they should certainly obtain Riches and Honour, and every Thing else which this World accounts pleasant or desirable, only by joining heartily in the Prayers of the Church, I believe our Churches would be better filled than they usually are. But what Assurance would you have of this, O ye of little Faith? Does not our LORD Himself assure you in his Gospel, that *if two of you shall agree on Earth, as touching any Thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of his Father which is in Heaven?* You may therefore obtain all this, as far as God sees fit; that is, as far as is really the best and most convenient for you. Nay, you may for certain obtain what is infinitely more, and better than all these, by joining heartily

tily in the Prayers of the Church; you may obtain thereby the Gifts and Graces of God's Holy Spirit, and a sure Right and Title to the Kingdom of Heaven.

And now this, which must be granted by all to be a most easy and happy Employment; this, I say, makes so great a Part of divine Worship, as to give Denomination to the Whole, thus frequently expressed by *Public Prayers*. And if we duly consider the Nature of Prayer, and the Greatness of that God who is the Object of it, we must further allow it to be a very great Happiness that we have a beautiful and excellent Liturgy, compiled for that Purpose by good and wise Men; whereby we are the better secured from being rash with our Mouths, and letting our Hearts be hasty to utter before the tremendous Majesty of Heaven, any Thing that is trifling, improper, or indecent; and the better enabled to raise and keep up in our Souls those holy Affections of Fear, Love, Gratitude, Trust, Resignation, and the like, which constitute the true spiritual Worship of God.

THIRDLY, Another Part of divine Worship is, to render and ascribe all Honour, Praise, and *Thanksgiving* to God,

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for his infinite Glories and Perfections, manifest in the Creation, Preservation, and Redemption of the World, and for all his Mercies and Favours bestowed on us in particular. This is the Employment of Cherubims and Seraphims, the highest Rank and Order of Angels, who *with all the heavenly Hosts, are evermore praising God, and saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts:* And shall not we, Dust and Ashes! esteem it an high Favour and Privilege, that we are allowed to join with this heavenly Choir, in so noble and worthy an Employment; but basely and ungratefully draw back and murmur, and repine against God himself for requiring this of us; and at his Ministers, for pressing and urging us to it? That this is not only great and glorious in itself, but full of the highest Delight and Pleasure, appears, in that those glorious Spirits reap their chief Happiness, which is as full and complete as their Natures will allow of, from this blessed Employment. And that it might be so to us is plain, inasmuch as Truth itself is so very agreeable and acceptable to our Minds; and therefore, the possessing our Minds with a deep Sense of the Power, Wisdom, and Goodness of God, who is the Fountain of all Truth,

Truth, must be so too; especially if we consider Him, at the same Time, as our greatest Benefactor, who bears us the most entire Love and Good-will. And then for the exerting of our Minds in Expressions of Gratitude, and testifying our Thankfulness for the Benefits received from Him; this is so agreeable and natural to us, that nothing can be more so; *It fills our Souls as with Marrow and Fatness*, Psal. lxxiii. 5. Our Minds are then entertained with the pleasing Contemplation of those Favours we acknowledge, and of the Kindness of God in bestowing of them; which, as it makes up a great Part of the Happiness of the Angels and Saints in Heaven, so it is the best Heaven we can enjoy on Earth.

What I have here observed of those delightful Duties of Praise and Thanksgiving, may in a more especial Manner be applied to the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, very properly called *the Eucharist*, as being a thankful Commemoration of the infinite Love of our dear Redeemer; and the Means appointed by Himself of conveying to us, and a faithful Pledge to assure us of, those great Blessings of Pardon, Grace and Salvation, which he purchased for us at the Price of his

his own most precious Blood: It makes us Partakers of the Merits of CHRIST crucified, and unites us to CHRIST raised from the Dead, and glorified. And surely, if any Man love not the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and will not praise Him for his Goodness, and declare the Wonders that He hath done for the Children of Men, by a worthy Performance of this most advantageous and delightful Duty, he must be in a Condition not to be mentioned without Dread and Horror; he must be a most miserable, accursed Creature; he must be *Anathema, Maranatha*, 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

4thly, The FOURTH and last End of our coming to Church, is to get Information of our Duty; what it is that God requires of us. And this is to be done by giving diligent Attention to the Word of God read and explained to us, and that with full Purpose and Resolution to apply and practise those Instructions and Directions we meet with there. And this now, did we perform the fore-mentioned Parts of this Duty with a right Temper and Disposition of Mind, this would be as pleasant and delightful to us, as it is to a poor condemned Prisoner, to listen and attend to Directions given him for avoiding those

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Punishments he is sentenced to undergo, Thus we see what rare Entertainment we may meet with in the House of God, if we do not foolishly and carelessly deprive ourselves of it. Let those then that slight this Entertainment, that wilfully turn their Backs upon God's Service, and forsake the assembling of themselves together in his House of Prayer; let them consider how great an Injury they do to themselves, as well as Dishonour to Almighty God, that in forsaking his Service, they forsake their own Mercies, and sin against their own Souls; that they deprive themselves of that heavenly Manna, that Food of Angels, which ravishes the Hearts of a good People, and fills them with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory; that they cut themselves off from the Grace of God, and so will never be able to withstand Temptations, but will continually grow worse and worse, till they fall into the Pit of Destruction: Let them therefore resolve forthwith to arise and go to the heavenly Father; to give unto the Lord the Glory due unto his Name, by worshipping Him in the Beauty of Holiness.

If they thus shew themselves ready and willing to return to their Duty, God will give them the Power and Will to perform

it acceptably, through JESUS CHRIST. If they humble themselves greatly before Him in the Assemblies of his People, and with contrite and obedient Hearts beg his Pardon, as for all their other Sins and Offences, so in particular for their great Folly and Perverseness, in leaving undone those Things, which, by all the Ties of Duty, Interest, and Gratitude, they ought to have done; then will our Almighty and most merciful Father have Compassion on them, for as his Majesty is, so is his Mercy; He will pardon and deliver them from all their Sins, through the Merits and Intercession of our blessed Redeemer; and if they are but careful to wipe off the Scandal of their former Negligence, by giving all Diligence to make their Calling and Election sure, He will confirm and strengthen them in all Goodness, with the renewing and sanctifying Graces of his holy Spirit; and in the blessed Paths of Truth and Holiness, conduct them safe to his everlasting Kingdom.

But let them ever be mindful of this important Truth, that their Zeal for the public Worship and Service of God, must bear a due Proportion to the Greatness

of the Blessings that are there conferred upon them. And this indeed is a Truth that deserves to be well considered by every Christian; for as our Happiness is very great when we perform this Duty in Humility and Sincerity, as I hope I have already proved, and as all must acknowledge, whose Hearts are right towards God, and who worship Him in Spirit and in Truth; so we cannot express too great a Zeal for this Duty. Our Zeal for God's public Worship ought to be as boundless as God himself, who is the Object of our Worship and Adoration; and we never can arrive at that Height of Zeal for God's Service, but we shall still find Reason for our rising higher. But however, every Man that values the Favour of God and his own eternal Welfare, must have so much Zeal for God's public Worship, as will make him prefer that before any worldly Business or Interest; so that whenever these come in Competition, and clash with his Duty, when he cannot attend them and divine Service at the same Time, the latter is to be preferred; excepting only in Cases of absolute and unavoidable Necessity, or in Cases of great Charity and Mercy.

For might any be allowed to plead Throng of Business as an Excuse for omitting this Duty, much more might holy *David*, who had the Weight and Care of a great Kingdom continually pressing upon him; and yet, in *Psalms* cxxii. 1. we find him speaking thus; *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the House of the Lord.*

If we consider the Time when he wrote that Psalm, which was either at his first settling at *Jerusalem*, upon his taking it from the *Jebusites*, or at his Return thither after his Banishment, occasioned by the unnatural Rebellion of his Son *Abshalom*, we cannot but suppose him, upon either of these Occasions, busily employed, either in establishing his Kingdom as at the first, or reforming and settling Things right again upon his Return: And yet, in the Multitude of his Thoughts bestowed on these so great and important Affairs, he no sooner received the first Impression of his Subjects good Inclinations to go up to worship God in his Sanctuary, but all these worldly Thoughts and Cares vanished immediately, as the Stars at the Appearance of the Sun; and his pious Soul was so entirely taken up with the Prospect of that Pleasure and Delight he

was then going to enjoy in the Service of his GOD, as to leave no Room for such mean Thoughts, as those were which concerned his earthly Kingdom; and in that divine Rapture he penned the above-mentioned Psalm, extolling the Glory and Honour which redounded even to *Jerusalem*, upon its being pitched on for the Place where this heavenly Exercise was to be performed. Nor was this any sudden Transport, any unusual, extraordinary Fit of Devotion, but the constant Frame and Temper of his Mind, as it is plain, in that upon all Occasions he discovers the same throughout the Book of Psalms: As where he speaks thus; *As the Hart panteth after the Water-brooks, so panteth my Soul after thee, O God! My Soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?* Psalm xlii. 1, 2. And again, *Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 2, How amiable are thy Tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My Soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the Courts of the Lord; my Heart and my Flesh crieth out for the living God.* And again, *Ver. 10. One Day in thy Courts is better than a Thousand; I had rather be a Door-keeper in the House of my God, than to dwell in the Tents of Wickedness.*

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This great Example, one would think, should be sufficient to confront that careless Unconcernedness, that Coldness and Indifferency, which the People of this Age are too apt to discover with regard to the public Worship of GOD. For as the Nature and Will of GOD is now more perfectly revealed by JESUS CHRIST, whom He hath sent; so the Worship of GOD under the Gospel is far more perfect than it was under the Law. GOD was then worshipped in Types and Shadows, but now in Spirit and in Truth. The Offerings that were then made to Him were dead Bulls and Goats, but those that are now made to Him by us Christians, are ourselves, our own Hearts and Lives. The Incense that we now burn, is that of a fervent Prayer, and the Duty of Praise and Thanksgiving, is the constant Sacrifice that GOD now requires at our Hands: And if GOD was pleased to dwell in the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple, by his glorious Presence over the Mercy-seat, so is he pleased to dwell in our Christian Assemblies by his holy Spirit; as our Saviour himself assures us in the Place before cited, *Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the Midst of them.* If there-

fore holy *David* was so zealous for the Service of God, required by the Law of *Moses*, which was but a carnal Ordinance, and had only a Shadow of good Things to come; with what affectionate Zeal should we express our grateful Sense of the mighty Favour we Christians enjoy, of worshipping God according to the Truth of the Gospel, and with such spiritual Sacrifices as are acceptable to Him by JESUS CHRIST? *1 Pet. ii. 5.* Certainly, the same Zeal for the Public Worship of God, which *David* so often expresses, is a Duty incumbent upon all Christians, a necessary Condition of their Acceptance with God: And I shall now endeavour to prove it to be so from these three following Particulars:

FIRST, From the Reasonableness and Equity of it. SECONDLY, From the very End and design of Religion: And, THIRDLY, From the Declarations of holy Scripture, which prove this to be our Duty.

FIRST then, This Zeal for God's public Service is a very reasonable Duty; it is nothing but what we must own and acknowledge highly agreeable to that Notion we have of God's Perfections to ex-
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act of us. Nay, it is nothing but what we ourselves, in like Circumstance, do expect from each other. I have already made it appear from a brief Survey of what we are to do at Church, that our Employment there is so suited and adapted to our rational Nature, as to entertain all its Powers with the most delightful, satisfactory Pleasure: Is it not therefore highly reasonable for us, if not out of our own Interest, yet in Deference to Him, who hath been graciously pleased to make such Provision for our Happiness, to accept it with all imaginable Zeal and Thankfulness? For, to make the Case our own; if any of us, out of an entire Love and Affection to our Friends, shall spare neither Cost nor Pains to provide the greatest Dainties and Delicacies to entertain them withal, and they should slight and neglect our Invitation; or immediately before they come, fill themselves with coarse Fare or mean Trash, so as to have no Appetite or Relish for what was prepared with so much Care, should not we think ourselves ill requited for our Kindness? This then is the Case here; our gracious LORD hath provided this heavenly Employment, to entertain and gratify the noblest Faculties of our Mind; and yet we are apt to make light

of it, to absent yourselves upon any trivial Occasion; or if we do come, it is after our Minds have been so wholly taken up with sensual Pleasures and worldly Projects, as that they are perfectly indisposed for such a spiritual Exercise; and whilst we worship God with our Lips, our Hearts are far from Him.

SECONDLY, The Consideration of the very End and Design of Religion, will convince us of the Necessity of having this Zeal for the Worship and Service of God, which I have now been describing. For the Design of Religion, is to oppose those Prejudices and difficulties Mankind labour under in this imperfect State; for whereas human Souls, (if we look upon them as they are in themselves, pure, spiritual, immaterial Substances) are most properly, and most agreeably to their Nature, employed in the Contemplation of the most glorious Truths, and in the Choice of the most desirable Good; but the strong Inclinations and Lustings of the Flesh against the Spirit, derived to us from the Fall of our first Parents, together with the Prejudices of Education, our being born Infants, and so for many Years wholly governed by the Impressions

sions of Sense, do much debase and weaken the nobler Faculties of our Minds, and incline us to take up with the poor and mean Entertainment we meet with here from the Things of this World, (these being become familiar to us) rather than search for a more rational, satisfactory Pleasure, in the untrodden Paths of Virtue. Now our Souls being thus in Danger of degenerating from the Rank of wise and rational Beings, to such a brutish Sensuality, Religion comes in to our Assistance, and discovers a wonderful Scene of Things to employ our Thoughts; prescribes such Rules and Measures as will not fail to set us right, if we carefully observe them; and then proposes such forcible Motives and Encouragements, as, notwithstanding their former Prejudices, give them infinitely the Better of Vice: Now unless these have so long engaged us in the Practice of Virtue, as that our Judgments are fully and clearly informed of the real Worth and Excellency of those Courses, and our Wills and Affections so far influenced by them, as that we can take Pleasure and Delight therein, Religion hath not yet had its intended Effect upon our Minds.

THIRDLY, What alone might satisfy us of the Necessity of this zealous Disposition for the Worship and Service of Almighty God, are the exprefs Indications we have of the divine Will and Pleasure concerning this Particular in holy Scripture: For thus in the Old Testament, we find Almighty God by his Prophets heavily complaining of the unworthy Returns of his People the *Jews*, for all the wonderful Deliverances wrought for that Nation; in that they grew weary of his Service, and of the solemn Time set apart for it, wishing the New Moons and the Sabbaths over, that they might return to their worldly Employments again. He declares, therefore, his Resentment of this their Behaviour. *That he loathed and abhorred such forced unwilling Services; that a Sacrifice offered with such a listless Mind, was to Him as the cutting off a Dog's Neck*, Isa. lxvi. 3. And in the New Testament we find our Blessed Saviour evermore zealous for the Worship and Service of God: He made it his Meat and Drink to do his heavenly Father's Will; He drove the Buyers and Sellers out of the Temple, the Place of God's Worship, with an unusual Anger and Resentment; overthrowing the Tables of the Money-changers,

changers, and the Seats of them that sold Doves, and charging them with making his Father's House an House of Merchandize, which was designed for an House of Prayer. And this he did with so much Warmth and Earnestness, that it put his Disciples in Mind of that Passage in *Psal. lxi. 9. The Zeal of thine House hath eaten me up.* And after our LORD's Ascension into Heaven, we find his Apostles copying after his holy Pattern; *St. Luke xxiv. 53. For they were continually in the Temple, praising and blessing God.* The primitive Christians likewise expressed the same earnest Zeal for the Worship and Service of God; it was their distinguishing Mark and Character, (as I observed above, that) *they continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship; and in breaking of Bread and in Prayer.* Let us likewise, after these great Examples, be evermore zealous for the Worship and Service of our God. Let us not deprive ourselves of the Comfort and Happiness of our Religion here, and of the Benefit of it hereafter, by neglecting and despising this great Duty; but esteeming it an eminent Favour and Privilege to be admitted into the special Presence of the Almighty, who hath Heaven for his Throne, and the Earth for his Footstool, and the greatest
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of Blessings, even Fulness of Joy, to partake thereof. Let us give all Diligence to secure to ourselves this inestimable Blessing, by sincerely loving the Habitation of God's House, and greatly delighting to enter into his Gates with Thanksgiving, and into his Courts with Praise; so shall we advance the Honour of our God, and He will promote the Happiness of us his People; He will send us Help from the Sanctuary, and strengthen us out of *Zion*: We shall be abundantly satisfied with the Fatness of his House, and He will make us drink of the River of his Pleasures.

I shall now consider the common Pretextes which the Neglecters or Despisers of God's public Worship, are wont to alledge in their own Excuse for omitting so great and necessary a Duty; and shall endeavour to expose the Weakness of them.

FIRST, And the first that I shall mention is taken from the ill Lives of some that do frequent God's House and Service. Ask some of these Absenters from the Church, why they do seldom appear in it; and they will tell you, they think it in vain to come, since they see many that do come there, altogether as bad as them-

selves. I must confess, this is a sad Objection, and heartily wish it was well considered by all that give Occasion for it; they would be found self-condemned, and could not surely think themselves any longer safe upon the Brink of Ruin: For certain it is, that such as pretend to honour God with their Lips, while their Hearts are far from Him, do but mock Him, and thereby increase his Anger; and by thus giving Offence to their Neighbours by their scandalous Lives, while they pretend to serve and worship God, they incur that dreadful Woe denounced by our Saviour in the Gospel, against that Man by whom the Offence, cometh, *St. Matt. xviii. 7.* But then, if some do thus live wicked Lives while they frequent God's Public Worship, this is no just Excuse for others to stay away: Other People's Faults will not excuse our Duty; if they receive no Benefit from God's Ordinances, the Fault is their own, viz. because they abuse them. Let us but use them rightly, and we shall find them really become the Means of Grace and Salvation to our Souls. Let those then that urge the wicked Lives of some that come to Church, as an Excuse for their staying away, only consider this certain

certain Truth, that there is this material Difference betwixt those People that come to Church, and those that stay away; that the former Sort may become better if they will by their constantly praying for, and their carefully using the promised Aids of God's holy Spirit to amend their Lives, and to secure their Salvation: But the latter Sort never can become better; it is as impossible they should, as for a dead Man, by his own Strength, to raise himself to Life again: They reject all those Means which God hath appointed, whereby to bring them to everlasting Happiness: and therefore must of Necessity be lost and undone for ever.

SECONDLY, Some are apt to think themselves good Christians, and to hope very well of their eternal State and Condition in the other World, if they are but sober and temperate in their Lives, just and honest in their Dealings, and peaceable and quiet among their Neighbours, though at the same Time they neither honour God's holy Name nor his Word, nor keep his Sabbaths, nor reverence his Sanctuary; but slight his Ordinances, despise his Sacraments, and disregard the Times and Places of his Public Worship; thus

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contenting themselves with observing those Duties that relate to themselves and their Neighbours, but taking no Notice of the Duties that are owing to God. But now, that such People may no longer depend upon a false Security, and speak Peace to their Consciences where there is no Peace, I would desire them to consider, that a Man may be sober and temperate for the Sake of his Health, and just and honest in his Dealings, in regard to his Credit and worldly Interest; and then there is nothing of Religion in all this: But if he observes these Duties as Duties, or because God hath commanded them, and from a Principle of Love to Him, let him remember, that there are Duties owing immediately to God himself, which must by no Means be neglected. He that desires to approve himself to God, must be especially careful to honour his holy Name and Word, and to walk in all his holy Ordinances, that so he may obtain Grace to keep all his Commandments, and to serve him truly all the Days of his Life. Thus the Gospel teaches us to live, not only soberly and righteously, but godly too, in this present World; and if we neglect this last-named Branch of our Duty, while we observe the other two, to make ourselves Transgressors of the

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the Whole: *Yea, if we keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, we are guilty of all*, St. James ii. 10. Because the Authority of the Lawgiver is as truly despised by the Breaking any one of his Laws, as by the Violation of them all: And he that will not be restrained by the Authority of GOD from breaking one Commandment, would, under the like Temptation, break any of the rest.

THIRDLY, Another Sort of those who neglect or despise the Public Service of the Church, are such as seem to be above Instruction; are such as are too wise to be taught, or at least think they can improve themselves better at Home, by reading some good Book, than by attending our public Assemblies. But now, such mistaken People would do well to consider, that the great End of our religious Assemblies is to worship GOD; to confess our Sins to Him, with lowly, penitent, and obedient Hearts; to render Thanks for the great Benefits which we have received at his Hands; to set forth his most worthy Praise, and jointly to ask those Things which are requisite and necessary, both for our Souls and Bodies; as well as to hear GOD's holy Word: And when we join with our Christian Brethren

Brethren in doing all this in GOD's own House, according to his Command, with devout and faithful Hearts, our blessed LORD will come amongst us, and give us his Blessing: But if we refuse to do this, we have no Encouragement to hope for any one Blessing promised by GOD in holy Scripture. No, if we really expect GOD's Blessing, without which neither the Reading of good Books, nor any other Religious Performance, can profit us any Thing; if, I say, we really expect GOD's Blessing, we must seek it in GOD's own Way, that is, by doing what He commands, by observing his Ordinances, and consequently, by frequenting his Public Worship, whenever He or his Church requires us so to do; and then indeed we may justly hope for his Blessing, for thus he promises *Moses*, *Exod. xx. 24.* *In all Places where I record my Name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.* But whilst we neglect to join in the Public Service of his Church, as vainly imagining we can employ ourselves better at Home, we are represented in Scripture, as in a Condition far removed from the Blessing of GOD, in a Condition most dismal and deplorable in all Respects, even in a Condition approaching near to the dreadful Doom
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of Apostates, which is eternal Death, and Misery.

This terrible Truth we are taught by the Apostle, *Heb. x. 26, 27.* *For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation, which shall devour the Adversaries.* Now if the neglecting the Public Service of the Church be not the very Sin of which the Apostle here speaks, denouncing the dreadful Judgment upon the Persons guilty of it, that there remains no more Sacrifice for Sin, to such, but a fearful looking for of Judgment; it is certain this is a Sin that approaches near it: For that causal Particle [*for*] in the Beginning of the 26th Verse, plainly joins it with that which went before, and shews, this fearful Judgment is there denounced as a Motive to engage us to take Care of falling into that Sin, against which he had cautioned us before. And now, the Sin which he cautions us against in the foregoing Verse, is this, of *forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*; so that the Persons guilty of it, may justly with Dread and Horror read these frightful Words;

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as seeing themselves, if not in that desperate Estate, yet approaching near to it.

But to make this more plain and evident, and because this Place of Scripture hath perplexed the Minds of many Christians, who have fallen into some wilful Sin, after they have been once enlightened, renewed, and sanctified by the gracious Influence of his holy Spirit; I shall here bespeak my Reader's Patience, while I endeavour to shew what appears to me to be the true Import or Meaning of it: To which End it will be necessary to premise somewhat concerning the Scope or Design of this Epistle.

The *Hebrew* Converts then, (to whom the Apostle writes this Epistle) lay at that Time under a sharp and severe Persecution, inflicted upon them by those unbelieving *Jews* amongst whom they lived. This Storm had caused some to make Shipwreck of their Faith, by openly renouncing his sacred Name to whom they had given up themselves. Others, though they had not proceeded so far as to turn open Apostates had yet withdrawn themselves from the Assemblies of their Fellow-Christians, met together for the solemn

lemn Worship of God, for Fear of suffering Persecution on that Account. The Apostle therefore sends this Epistle to those who still continued faithful, to exhort them to hold fast their Profession to the End, making use of two different Sorts of Motives to this Purpose; the former, to encourage them patiently to suffer whatever their Adversaries should inflict upon them for the Name of CHRIST, drawn from the Consideration of the Excellency of the Christian Religion, in Respect of its Author the eternal Son of GOD, who came down Himself from Heaven, to settle and establish it in the World; in Respect to its Holiness and Purity, so far beyond the Ceremonial Law in Respect of the rich and precious Promises contained in it, and the like: The latter, to deter them from renouncing their Faith for Fear of suffering for it, taken from the Consideration of those dreadful Punishments to be inflicted on them by the divine Justice, if they despised so great Salvation; as far beyond what the Despisers of *Moses's* Law were to suffer, as the Author and Founder of their Faith was above him. So that the chief Scope and Design of this Epistle, is to warn and caution the *Hebrew* Christians, to whom

was sent, to beware of two Things; first, of turning Apostates, or renouncing their Faith; secondly of deserting the Profession of it, by forsaking the assembling of themselves together. In Opposition to the first of these, he exhorts them, *ver. 23. to hold fast the Profession of their Faith without wavering*: and against the latter he cautions them, *ver. 25. not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*: And then immediately subjoins those terrible Words before-mentioned, to enforce both the foregoing Admonitions.

By this Sin therefore is meant, primarily, the Sin of Apostacy; the open renouncing the Faith of Christ through Fear of suffering for it: And he who doth this, renouncing that which he knows to be the only propitiatory Sacrifice for Sin, what can remain for him, but a fearful looking for of Judgment, and fiery Indignation? Since he knows there is none other Name under Heaven, given amongst Men, whereby they may be saved, but that Name which he hath renounced. And secondarily, we are to understand this of the Sin of forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as this is a secret and implicit deserting of the

the Faith, and in the Opinion of the Apostle, the next Degree to it ; it being improbable, that he who hath already renounced the public Profession of his Faith through Fear, should be backward to renounce his Faith too, if under some severe Penalty he should be required to do it ; against which therefore he cautions the *Hebrew* Christians, under fearful Judgments. And if there be any Difference betwixt the forsaking the assembling ourselves together in Times of Persecution, and in Times of Peace and Liberty ; the latter must be most inexcusable where the Public Worship of God is neglected without any such Temptation from Fear of suffering for it.

And now would those that forsake our Public Assemblies, read over these fearful Words, and seriously consider how nearly they are concerned in them, how near they approach to that desperate and deplorable State described in them ; they could not certainly deceive themselves with the vain Hopes of serving God acceptably at Home, while they wilfully neglect the Public Service of his Church ; they would rather make haste to escape his Vengeance, by continuing no longer

that Neglect, the Consequence of which is so dangerous and deadly.

But indeed, these Despisers of God's Word and Worship, that I am now speaking of, commonly go farther; they set up for Critics, and take upon them to judge and censure their Teachers; and if they are not such as will gratify their itching Ears with Novelties, or prophesy Deceits, and speak Peace to their Consciences when there is no Peace; if they have renounced all enticing Words of Man's Wisdom, and cannot dispense with the popular Ways of insinuating and winding themselves into Men's Favour, being not so desirous to please them as to do them Good; I say, their Teachers be such as these, these Judges are presently offended, and all away. And indeed it is no wonder that the Minister of the Gospel, in this degenerate and corrupted Age of the Church, should meet with Men of such untractable and censorious Spirits, since our great Lord and Master, the Author and Fountain of Wisdom, met with many so conceited of their own Parts and Knowledge, that they thought themselves too wise to be instructed by Him: *He bath a Devil and is mad,* said the Pharisees) *why bear ye him?* John 20. And so did his Disciples also with

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such Despisers of the Word and Doctrine, though they were endowed with the extraordinary Gifts and Graces of the Holy Spirit. The great Apostle of the Gentiles (St. Paul himself) did not escape these Censurers; he informs us of some who said, *that his bodily Presence was weak, and his Speech contemptible*, 2 Cor. x. 20. It cannot therefore seem strange to the present Ministers of God's Word to meet with the like Usage. But now these Despisers of their spiritual Guides would do well to consider, that how mean soever an Opinion they may have entertained of them, yet they are the persons to whom the immediate Care and Conduct of their Souls is committed, by the great Bishop and Pastor of them, CHRIST JESUS; that they have received a true and lawful Commission from Christ to preach the Word; that they are invested with Authority from Above, to become as it were the Mouth of the Congregations wherein they minister; to offer up their Prayers, Praises, and Thanksgivings to GOD; to proclaim and publish, in the Name of their great LORD and Master, to all penitent Believers, the Remission and Forgiveness of Sins; to administer the Sacraments to those who are rightly disposed to receive the same; and, in a Word, to perform whatever other Offices belong to their sacred Function.

tion. They would do well also to consider, that the Power and Efficacy of the Word, and other public Means of Grace, depend neither upon the Knowledge nor Piety of the Minister, but proceed from the free Bounty and Goodness of God; for whoever may plant, it is God alone that gives the Increase; who never withholds his Blessings from those, who come to his Ordinances with Hearts duly prepared and fitted to receive them. And lastly, they would do well to consider the strict Obligations they lie under to assemble themselves together with the rest of their Fellow-Christians, for the solemn Worship and Service of God; the deserting of which, as I have shewed already, can be looked upon as no other than the deserting of their Faith, or at least the public Profession of it. Would they but seriously consider the foregoing Particulars, they could not but see, that such vain Pretences as these are so far from being a just Excuse, that they are an high Aggravation of their Guilt; for thus in despising and censuring their Teachers, they despise not Men but God; and will they be wiser than him too? They despise not the Person to whom the Care and Conduct of their Souls are committed, but they despise Him that sent him; and

in despising Him, they despise his heavenly Father also: Thus our LORD himself informs us, St. Luke x. 16. *He that beareth you, beareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.*

FOURTHLY, Another common Pretence which the poorer Sort of People are wont to alledge, in Excuse for their neglecting the Public Service of the Church, is the Want of Cloaths; they have not Cloaths to appear in there, like others of the same Rank with themselves, and therefore are ashamed to come. But this is so far from being a just Excuse, that it is a plain and evident Demonstration, that those who make it have no true Sense of Religion upon their Minds, nor of the weighty and important Duties they are called to perform in the House of God; for did they consider the infinite Majesty of that great and glorious Being, who though he fills Heaven and Earth, as the Prophet speaks of Him, *Jer. xxiii. 24.* yet vouchsafes his special and more immediate Presence in the Assemblies of his faithful People; and did they consider wherein that Worship and Service doth consist; which He there expects and requires from them, it would be impossible they should be so much

much concerned about their outward Apparel, which can only make them agreeable in the Eyes of the Congregation, their Fellow-Creatures, Dust and Ashes like themselves; but can no ways serve to render their Persons or their Services acceptable in the Sight of God; for Almighty God hath no Regard to the outward Dress, but to the inward Temper and Disposition of the Heart; He will shew the same Respect to the Oblations of an holy and devout Soul that appears before Him cloathed in Rags as in Tissue: It is not the outward Adorning of the Body, but the inward Ornament of a meek and virtuous, and holy and pious Spirit, that attracts the Favour of Heaven: Nay, as our outward Apparel does no way recommend our Persons to the Grace and Favour of God, so neither does it contribute in the least to the performing those Sacrifices aright which He requires and expects from us, when we tread his Courts. Thus, for Instance, what Assistance can the richest Attire afford us in confessing our Sins to Almighty God, with Hearts full of Sorrow and Contrition for having offended so tender and gracious a Father, with stedfast Resolutions of Amendment; and with earnest longing Desires to be delivered from the whole Body of Sin;

which is the first Part of that divine Worship our Church directs us to offer up to God in our Public Assemblies? The like might be observed of all the other Parts of it; the very naming of which would be sufficient to shew, that they have no Relation to, no Dependence upon our outward Apparel: And therefore since the best Attire cannot recommend us to God, nor fit us for his Service, nor the worst hinder us in the least from finding Acceptance with Him, and receiving those inestimable Favours and Blessings which He is ready to bestow on those who wait upon Him in a due Observance of his Ordinances; the Want of good Cloaths can be no just Excuse for any Person's absenting himself from the Public Service of the Church.

I would gladly know of that Person who makes this a Pretence for his Absence, what End he would propose to himself in going to Church, if he had Cloaths according to his Mind: If he say, his chief End or Design in going thither, should then be to pay his bounden Duty of Worship and Homage to Almighty God, and to learn his Will, by hearing his Word read and explained to him: I may and do assure him, that
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all this may as well be done in those poor Rags he now hath, as in any the most splendid Apparel, though as rich as ever *Solomon* in all his Glory was arrayed with. Persons clothed in vile Raiment, may perhaps find but cold Reception at great Men's Houses, may be forced to keep their Distance, to stand without their Doors, or it may be without their Gates; but they are allowed as free Access to the House of God, as the greatest Men upon Earth: and if their Hearts be as holy and as heavenly, shall be as well accepted of by Him, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. And this, methinks, is a Consideration sufficient to support them under any Contempt and Scorn they may suffer here: and likewise to engage them thankfully to embrace all Opportunities of appearing in his Presence, who will give them liberally, and upbraid them not.

But now, to lay open the Bottom of this vain Pretence; those Persons, who notwithstanding this Encouragement, absent themselves from the House of God for Want of what they call good Cloaths to appear in, plainly declare that they are not the Servants of God, but of Men: as being more desirous to approve themselves in the Sight of Men (who look

only on the Outside) than in the Sight of God, who seeth the Heart. Nay, indeed, they declare themselves to be Servants or Slaves to the vile Affections of Pride and Vanity. How low or mean soever their Condition and Circumstances in the World may be, they think as well, or better of themselves, than many of those who wear better Apparel; and therefore cannot endure to appear at Church in a worse Garb than they. So that in short, Pride and Vanity, Profaneness and Irreligion, are at the Bottom of this vain Excuse, which keep so many of the poorer Sort of Persons from the House and Service of God. And this makes it so very hard and difficult a Matter to reclaim them; all Admonitions and Exhortations to that Purpose being in vain, till those vile Affections are first in some good Measure rooted out or subdued; which, alas! is not easily to be done, or of a sudden.

FIFTHLY, Another Pretence which some are ready to make when they are charged with a Neglect of so plain and necessary a Duty as Public Worship, is the Want of Health: They are weak and sickly, and therefore they cannot come. This indeed is the most reasonable Excuse that can be alledged by them; for
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where it is true, it takes off the heavy Guilt of that Sin I am now endeavouring to set forth; that lying only upon those who do it wilfully, and without any apparent Necessity. Where a Person through Sickness, or any great bodily Indisposition, cannot go to Church without the manifest Hazard of his Life; there that Declaration of Almighty God himself, cited by our Lord, *St. Matt. ix. 13. I will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*, may be his sufficient Warrant to stay at Home. And if the Hearts of any such sick or infirm Persons do, as they ought, accompany their Fellow-Christians to the Public Assemblies, I make no Question, but as Members of the same Body, they partake likewise of those Blessings of God's Presence which He has graciously promised to their united Prayers and Supplications. But because this is sometimes used only as a Colour or Pretence, to take off the public Shame and Scandal of this Sin, I must not pass it by without prescribing a plain and obvious, but a sure and certain Sign, whereby to distinguish this from the other, which must be allowed a sufficient Cause of any Person's Absence from the House and Service of God; and that is this, If the Person who makes this Excuse, can upon his worldly Occasions go

twice as far as his House is from the Church, and stay out in the Cold twice as long as he would be obliged to do in the Church; this is a plain and manifest Token, that it is not Sickness, but somewhat worse, the Want of a due Relish for spiritual Things, if not a profane and irreligious Turn of Mind, that keeps him from it: For, as for any real Infirmary, or bodily Indisposition that a Person may labour under; that is so far from being a just Excuse for his absenting himself from the Public Service of God, that it should rather excite and stir him up to take special Care of losing no Opportunities of joining therein: For he ought to look upon that Weakness and Indisposition, whatever it be, as a Messenger sent from Heaven to put him in Mind of his Mortality, and to warn him to prepare for his great Change, which he hath Reason to believe may be drawing near; and therefore such Persons are, in a more especial Manner, obliged to spend as much of their Time as is possible in the Public Worship of God: Since the united Prayers of those true and faithful Christians there assembled together, must be far more powerful and prevalent with Almighty God, than their own single Petitions offered up by themselves in pri-

vate. And that such Persons may not be afraid of increasing their Illness hereby, they ought to consider, what many have found true by their own happy Experience, that a particular Providence is there, watching over People for their Good, and preserving them from suffering any bodily Hurt in that Place where their Souls receive their spiritual Life, and Strength, and Nourishment; which may be a further Motive and Encouragement to sick Persons to let the Church be the first Place they visit, upon their going Abroad; there to offer up their hearty Praise and Thanksgiving to Almighty God for his late Mercies vouchsafed unto them.

SIXTHLY, Another Pretence which Despisers of the Public Service of the Church are wont to alledge in their own Excuse, is the Want of Time; their worldly Business lies so heavy upon them, that they cannot spare Time for this great Duty; that is, they cannot spare Time to serve Him who is the Giver of it; Him, to whom they are indebted for every Day, every Hour, and every Minute of their lives. Now He, who is thus the Author and Giver of their Time, allows them six Days in the Week, wherein to follow the

proper Works of their several Callings; and only reserves to himself the other one, to be employed wholly in his Service; and yet these unreasonable People think much to spare a few Hours of that one, for the Public Worship and Service of God. Had any of these Persons such kind Landlords as would freely allow them six Parts of the Estates they hold of them, and only reserve a seventh for their own Use, they would not certainly be so unjust or ungrateful, as once to think of keeping back any Part of that small Portion required from them; but honestly and thankfully pay that to the utmost Farthing. How is it then that they are not ashamed to deal so unjustly and unworthily by the great LORD and Giver of their Time, as not only to withhold some of that small Portion He hath reserved to Himself, but to rob Him of the whole: And to own it too, as all those properly do, who make their worldly Business a Pretence for neglecting the Public Worship and Service of God.

But if a sense of Justice and Gratitude will not work upon these Persons, it may be that of Interest will: Do those then that make this vain Excuse believe that they have Souls as well as Bodies to take Care of; immortal Souls, that must live
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for ever, either in a State of everlasting Happiness, or everlasting Torments? Certainly they do not, otherwise it would be impossible for them to think much of bestowing so small a Portion of their Time in providing for the eternal Welfare of them. Are these frail mortal Bodies of theirs, which they know ere long must be laid in the Grave, and turned to Corruption, so dear to them, that they can be contented to rise up early, to take their Rest late, to eat the Bread of Carefulness, and with unwearied Diligence to follow their worldly Business all the Week, and all this to provide Food and Raiment for them? And are their never-dying Souls of so small Value, that they are unwilling to spend one Day in seven, nay, a few Hours of it, in feeding them with that Bread of Life which endureth for ever?

But since these Persons Concern for their Bodies is so great that it wholly excludes all Thoughts of making Provision for their Souls; they would do well to consider, that the Time they bestow in the Public Worship and Service of GOD will really contribute more to the Welfare of their Bodies, than that which they spend elsewhere in the most painful Labour.

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For first, This will recommend their honest Endeavours and careful Diligence in the Works of their Callings, to the Favour of Heaven, for the obtaining all those Blessings promised by Almighty God to his faithful obedient Servants. *Deut. xxviii. 3. Blessed shalt thou be in the City, and blessed shalt thou be in the Field; blessed shall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Ground, and the Fruit of thy Cattle, the Increase of thy Kine, and the Flocks of thy Sheep; blessed shall be thy Basket and thy Store; blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.* And now in which of all the several Works of their Callings, can these worldly-minded People employ this small Portion of Time so much to their temporal, bodily Advantage, as in the sincere Worship of God, in the Assemblies of his Servants met together for that Purpose, which will thus at once recommend their Persons and their Families, their Houses and their Goods, their Cattle and their Lands, to the Protection, Care, and Blessing of the Almighty?

But then, secondly, That the Time spent in the sincere and faithful Worship of God contributes most to the real Happiness of the Body, will further appear, if

if we consider, that though these frail Bodies of ours are, in respect of their present Frame and Contexture, mortal, and must shortly be laid in the Grave, and turned into Dust, yet they shall rise again at the last Day; some to everlasting Happiness and Glory in the Kingdom of Heaven; and some to everlasting Shame, Contempt, and Misery, in the bottomless Pit of Hell; and to which of these two different Estates they shall arise, whether to an Happiness that is unspeakable, a Glory that will shine brighter than the Sun in its full Strength; or to a State of horrible Darkness and most exquisite Misery, depends, in a great Measure, upon our careful Performance of this most weighty and important Duty: And therefore, though the Persons I am now speaking of seem to have no Notion of their Souls, and to take no Thought nor Care about them; yet, methinks for their dear Bodies Sake, they should be very willing to bestow their Time in the Service of God, which will so highly promote both the temporal and eternal Welfare of them.

These Considerations, I hope, will be sufficient to convince all those of their Sin and Folly, who plead their worldly Business in Excuse for their neglecting the Public

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lic Worship and Service of God; and to engage them to have a greater Regard to this most necessary Duty, not only upon the LORD's Day, when no worldly Business is allowed of, but upon all the other Days appointed by our Church to be kept holy; to regard them also unto the LORD, by a faithful Discharge of all those Duties, which, as Members of the Church, they are then required to perform; by enlarging their private Devotions at Home, and especially by joining regularly, as often as they can, in our Public Assemblies, for the solemn Worship and Service of God. And since our Church hath made Provision for God's Public Worship every Day, hath appointed Psalms, and Lessons, and Prayers to be used in the House of God every Morning and Evening throughout the Year; that so the Christian Sacrifice of Prayer and Praise may be daily offered by us, as the Burnt-Offerings were by the *Jews*, by God's own Appointment and Command; the same Considerations should engage us all, where we have those blessed Opportunities, joyfully and thankfully to embrace them; to make it Part of our Business, every Day, to attend the Public Service of our Church; and at all Times to account this, as it really is, one of the most

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weighty and important Busineses of our Lives, as it so highly tends to the Advancement of God's Glory, and to the setting forward our own everlasting Salvation.

SEVENTHLY, The Badness of the Way, or the Foulness of the Weather, is urged by some Absenters from the Church, as an Excuse for their neglecting the Public Service of it. The Way and Weather are bad, and therefore they cannot come. But now, for the Conviction of such careless People, I need only desire them to put this Question to their own Consciences, whether if the Place of God's Public Worship was turned into a Place of Merchandize or Diversions, they would be as great Strangers there as now they are? and then seriously consider what Grounds they can have to expect, that the great Judge of all the World, at the last Day, should allow that to be a just Excuse for not coming to Church, which (themselves being Judges) was not thought sufficient to keep them from their Trade or Pleasures?

A truly pious Soul will be so far from suffering himself to be detained and kept at Home by a bad Day, or dirty Road, that

that he will rather look upon them as affording him some small Opportunity of testifying his Affection and Zeal for the Service of God. Thus King *David* declares to *Araunah*, that he would not sacrifice to the Lord his God of that which cost him nothing, 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. And whoever they be that chearfully and readily expose themselves to some Hardships or Inconveniencies in the Performance of this their bounden Duty, they shall not fail of an ample Recompence from Him who despiseth not the Day of small Things.

These are the pretended Excuses most commonly alledged by those who slight or cast off this great Duty of attending the Public Service of our Church. As for those who absent themselves thro' any Dislike to our Liturgy, or to any of the Rites and Ceremonies appertaining to it, I meddle not with them. The Excellency and Usefulness of our Liturgy hath been set forth by abler Pens, and with Strength of Argument abundantly sufficient to satisfy all unprejudiced Minds, as hath also the Expediency of all the Rites and Ceremonies appointed by our Church, either as proper Means to excite and keep up our devout and pious Affections (in which the Life and Spirit, as it were, of divine Worship

do consist) or else as natural outward Signs and Expressions of them, without which we cannot join together in the Public Worship of God. I shall only therefore, observe in general, that as no outward Rite or Ceremony is absolutely necessary and essential to the Worship of God, which is not found expressly enjoined by him in Scripture; so on the other Hand, no such Rite or Ceremony is unlawful or sinful, that is not either expressly forbidden in Scripture, or directly contrary to that general Rule of the Apostle, *Let all Things be done decently and in Order.* As for all other Rites and Ceremonies, which are neither enjoined nor forbidden in Scripture, they are the proper Object of our Christian Liberty, which consists not in an Exemption from them, but in such a right Notion and Apprehension of their Lawfulness and Indifferency in themselves, as may make us always ready and willing to conform ourselves to those which are established by that National Church in which we live; and an erroneous Opinion of the Unlawfulness or Sinfulness of any such indifferent, innocent Ceremony, intrenches no less upon that Christian Liberty, in which our LORD hath instated us, than the Opinion of the same being necessary and essential to Religion

ligion would: For the former deprives us of the Liberty we should have, to comply with such Rite where it is established; and the latter of our Liberty to omit it in other National Churches where it doth not obtain.

And thus I have endeavoured to set forth, in the clearest Light I was able, the Sin and Folly of those unhappy People, who wilfully neglect the Public Service of our Church; I have considered likewise the Pretences they usually alledge for such Neglect, and exposed the Weakness and Vanity of them: Pretences I call them, because I cannot think them the real, but the pretended Causes of their Absence from Church; the true Cause thereof being no other (in too many of them at least) than the Infidelity and Wickedness of their Hearts: They have no true Faith, nor Relish for spiritual Things; they have no Notion of their continual Dependence upon God for Life and Happiness; no true Sense of the inestimable Blessings of their Redemption, or of those wonderful Methods by which it was accomplished: or else they have lived in a long habitual Course of wilful Sins, and are afraid of having those Sins set before their Eyes, or being put in Mind of the Terrors of the

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Day of Judgment, and the Vengeance of eternal Fire, lest their Consciences should awake and make them uneasy. They rather chuse to put the evil Day as far from them as they can; and so go on, like an Ox to the Slaughter, without any Fear or Thought, to their own everlasting Destruction. The LORD awaken all such profane, such presumptuous Sinners, with the Thunder of his Power, and by the Terror of his Judgments make them sensible of their Sin and Danger, if nothing else will do it; that they may be glad to make their Peace with an offended GOD by a timely and sincere Repentance, and so escape the Miseries of a sad Eternity.

But however it shall please GOD to deal with such People, let me admonish, and persuade my Reader to avoid their Sin and Danger, by hallowing his Sabbaths, in going constantly to the Place of his public and solemn Worship, in Company with the great Congregation of his People; and esteeming this as a very weighty and important Duty. And since the Day of Judgment is coming on, wherein we must all give a strict Account of every wilful Omission of this great Duty; and every Omission will then be deemed a wilful one, when we were not hindered from coming

coming to Church by Sickneſs, or by ſuch Works of Neceſſity, or Works of Mercy, as could at no other Time have been performed; let us therefore repent of our former Omiſſions, and reſolve to obſerve this great and important Duty more carefully for the Time to come.

And becauſe GOD requires our whole Heart, and abhors the Sacrifices of ſuch formal Hypocrites as draw near to Him only with their Lips, while their Hearts are far from Him; let us therefore never content ourſelves barely with performing the outward Part, the bringing our Bodies to Church, as if it was all which was required of us; but let us endeavour to bring our Minds to a due Frame and Temper, that ſo we may be able to worſhip GOD in Sincerity and Truth, by exerting with the greateſt Vigour and Earneſtneſs, thoſe Affections which are proper to each Part of divine Worſhip.

To this End, let us, when we are going to Church, remember that we are going to the Houſe of GOD, to the Place where his Honour dwelleth, to the Place of his peculiar Preſence and Abode; where He takes particular Notice in what Condition we appear before him, how we have prepared

prepared ourselves for his Public Wor-
ship, and how we behave ourselves there-
in; and accordingly will reward us for
the Regard we pay, or punish us for the
Neglect we shew to his divine Majesty.
Let us therefore purge ourselves from all
Sin and Wickedness, before we enter those
Gates of Righteousness; for Holiness be-
cometh the House of God for ever; and
if we regard Iniquity in our Hearts, the
LORD will not hear us. Let us banish all
Hatred and Malice out of our Minds, for
if we forgive not Men their Trespases,
neither will our Heavenly Father forgive
us ours. Let us leave the Pleasures of
the World, and the Business of the World
behind us, for we cannot serve God and
Mammon. Let us resolve to be holy in
all Manner of Conversation, before we ap-
pear in the House of that Righteous God
who hateth Iniquity; *For none shall abide
in the Tabernacle of the Lord, none shall
dwell in his holy Hill; that is, none shall
be Partakers of his peculiar Grace and
Favour exhibited there, but they that
walk uprightly, and work Righteousness,
and speak the Truth from their Hearts.*

And when we are in the House of God,
let us behave ourselves as in his Sight and
Presence. Let us compose ourselves to a
serious

serious Frame and Temper, during the Time of divine Service: Let us guard our Eyes and Ears, our Thoughts and Hearts, that nothing may divert us, nothing interrupt us in the Discharge of our Duty. In a Word, Let us endeavour to raise and keep up in our Souls all those holy Affections that are proper to each Part of divine Service, confessing our Sins with an hearty Sorrow for, and a full Resolution to forsake them; praising and magnifying God's holy Name, with Hearts overflowing with Joy and Gratitude; hearing his holy Word with the utmost Reverence and Attention; and asking such Things as we stand in need of, with an entire Submission to his holy Will, and a full Trust in his Faithfulness and Mercy, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Thus let us worship God in Spirit and in Truth; and so doing, we shall live in the constant Enjoyment of the most rational Pleasure here in the Performance of our Duty, and reap the Benefits of it hereafter, eternal Bliss and Glory.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, three Persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all Praise and Glory, Might, Majesty, and Dominion, now, and for evermore. Amen.